

# **South Derbyshire Partnership**

## **Report to the Board**

**Date of meeting:** 17 January 2013

**Agenda Item:** 8

### **SWADLINCOTE TOWN CENTRE**

#### **1.0 Recommendations**

N/A

#### **2.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 2.1 To update Board Members on the Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy.
- 2.2 To provide Members with an opportunity to contribute views towards an "Our Town First" action plan.

#### **3.0 Details**

##### Swadlincote Town Centre Vision & Strategy

- 3.1 The transformation of Swadlincote town centre over the last decade has been both dramatic and positive. The combined efforts of the public, private and voluntary/community sectors have given rise to everything from major property developments and a new public square to business development and community safety activities.
- 3.2 In 2012 a new Vision & Strategy for Swadlincote Town Centre was adopted. This sets out a shared vision for the future, with a dynamic town centre where further investment will complement a unique heritage. The document aims to provide a firm basis for attracting new investment into the town and marshalling developer contributions for further enhancement of its public realm.
- 3.3 The proposals are set out as a series of Masterplans. These are not intended to be restrictive, but rather aim to inspire, encourage and shape the next phases of the town centre's development. Three themed Masterplans – focusing on townscape, movement and investment – have been drawn up using the assessment work undertaken and feedback from the public and businesses to inform and inspire new ideas and solutions. These are then brought together as an overall Masterplan.

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3.4 Accompanying the Masterplan is an Action Plan which identifies a series of measures that, if pursued by the public, private and voluntary/community sectors working in partnership, will contribute to the realisation of the vision over the coming years:

- Townscape: Protect heritage; Enhance the public realm; Maintain the environment.
- Movement: Improve signage; Pursue innovative transport solutions; Identify additional parking; Improve access; Promote community safety.
- Investment: Attract investment; Develop the market; Encourage more events; Support business development; Market the town; Renew public facilities; Invest in visitor attractions.

#### Our Town First – Town Team Partner Funding

3.5 The current government has expressed concern at the problems of High Streets and commissioned a study into the issue. One outcome of which was the 'Portas Pilots', involving Mary Portas. In two rounds, the Portas Pilot initiative generated over 400 applications nationwide for just 24 possible grants of £100,000, with applicants submitting a YouTube video with their application form. This Partnership applied on behalf of a Swadlincote Town Team in both rounds. Although unsuccessful in the main awards category, the Government awarded Swadlincote £10,000 under a programme called 'Our Town First'.

3.6 This Town Team Partner Funding aims to give towns which produced quality bids the opportunity to get some of their plans off the ground, trialing some of their bid proposals or modifying them to take account of other opportunities in town centre management. In addition to the grant, Town Team Partners benefit from:

- an advice line and a network of advisers managed by the Association of Town Centre Management, as well as informative events;
- direct mentoring and visits from a range of retail experts;
- regular meetings with other Town Teams to share lessons learned, tips and ideas; and, an online community to receive advice and information from retail experts.

3.7 In addition, some trade organisations, such as the National Association of British Market Authorities, have offered groups of towns working together discounts in purchasing goods and services.

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- 3.8 To secure the funding, towns completed a proforma confirming the support of their local MP. Given that this Partnership was the original applicant, it is important to gain Board Members' views on the way forward. As a general approach, it would seem logical that the grant should be used to contribute to the implementation of the Vision.

#### Action Plan Proposals

- 3.9 Working with Swadlincote Chamber of Trade and other partners, a Town Team action plan is being created with a series of measures to make Swadlincote a more attractive place to visit, invest in and to increase trading opportunities. The Town Team action plan is exploring the use of the £10,000 to develop projects that will enhance the town's market town brand and reputation, encouraging greater footfall. One option is to develop the brand image of Swadlincote: Market Town of The National Forest.
- 3.10 The Portas Pilot bid included a range of ideas: Flash events, entertainment and market town events (traditional and modern, including street markets); New retail enterprise initiatives; and, Activities that combine the public realm, heritage and independent retailers (e.g. the Wedding Bells idea which seeks to link related retailers and wedding venues across the town to retain as much wedding spend within the local economy as possible). Equally the competitive advantage of universally free car parking creates opportunities.
- 3.11 Swadlincote's bid also identified the development of retail kiosks and an action research feasibility project is being considered if a construction training partner can be identified. Finding solutions to the small number of long term vacant premises was a theme of the original bid, especially encouraging dialogue and engagement with absentee landlords. Whilst this work is probably beyond the scope of this funding, Town Team Partners will be looking to work in collaboration with other towns to mirror any successful interventions trialed elsewhere.
- 3.12 The views of Board Members are sought on the appropriateness of these ideas from the Portas Pilot bid for inclusion in the Town Team action plan and to add any further ideas that they may have.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Swadlincote has been awarded £10,000 by the Department for Communities and Local Government which must be administered through the District Council as the accountable body. Arrangements

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need to reflect the nature and size of the fund being administered, and systems put in place should make efficient any bureaucracy, not increase it, and be proportionate, light-touch and timely. No guidance has been officially issued on timescales but it has been anticipated that the funding needs to be spent within the next 18 months and a start will probably need to be made in this financial year.

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